Nixon Adroit in Use of News Leaks

By Jack Anderson

President Nixon has lived by the leak, just as he has been brought low by the leak.

In his attempt to control the flow of underground information from the White House, he has employed both "plumbers" and leakers.

Indeed, those presidential spokesmen, who have expressed such grand moral outrage over the House impeachment inquiry leaks, are some of the best leakers in the business.

We have made a careful study of presidential leaks, which are known in the backrooms of the White House as "Nofziger jobs," after former presidential aide Lyn Nofziger who was a master of the leak.

Not long after taking over the White House in 1969, President Nixon himself fashioned his public relations strategy in a series of eight secret memos to his staff chief, H. R. (Bob) Haldeman.

In a typical memo, dated Sept. 22, 1969, the President called his aides' tactics "inadequate" and "amateurish" and urged them to show more "bulldog" determination against people like Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.).

As former aide Jeb Stuart Magruder has confided: "The most sophisticated student of public relations in the White House was . . . the President himself."

The President's strategy included the adroit use of the leak. He favored staffmen Lyn Nofziger and Pat Buchanan, because of their excellent press contacts, to plant the stories the White House wanted sneaked out.

The President's favorite target was Kennedy. In an attempt to link Kennedy with Hanoi, for example, the President instructed Haldeman: "Buchanan's prudent primary group might get a major mailing out to editors and columnists in Massachusetts and perhaps even nationally, just setting forth the Hanoi quote . . . Buchanan also should be able to get a columnist or two (and Nofziger could help in this respect) to pick up this line."

Another time, Magruder planted an innocent picture of Kennedy and a beautiful woman, photographed on the streets of Rome, in a national scandal sheet. "It was later picked up by one of the news magazines," Magruder has confessed.

Former White House special investigator Jack Caulfield has also told senators behind closed doors how he tried to float a false story that the Kennedy family foundation had financed a newspaper series criticizing presidential pal C. G. (Bebe) Rebozo.

Caulfield told the senators that he recommended "an oblique Nofziger, an immediate drop vis-a-vis the Kennedys . . ."

The bewildered Senate Watergate staff, uninitiated in the backroom lingo of the White House, didn't understand. "What did that mean?" Caulfield was asked.

He explained painstakingly: "Well, what I meant was that consideration be given to have Lyn Nofziger speak with friends that he had in the media (about) whether or not the Newsday article was financed by the Kennedy Foundation."

Nofziger told us he did not leak the story. But someone did, since it was circulating around Washington at the time.

As another "Nofziger job," Caulfield testified in secret, he was asked to run "a name-check with the FBI" on moviemaker Emile De Antonio, who produced an anti-Nixon movie called "Millhouse: A White Comedy."

Caulfield got the obliging FBI to give him a summary of De Antonio's file, including raw data. Afterward, Caulfield reported jubilantly to his superiors: "If (Democratic National Chairman Larry) O'Brien is stupid enough to get behind (the film), we can, armed with the bureau's information, do a Nofziger job on De Antonio and O'Brien."

Again, a committee investigator wanted to know: "What do you mean . . . a Nofziger job?"

"What I mean," again recounted Caulfield, "is let him, Lyn Nofziger, whose talents in that area were much greater than anyone else around the White House . . . make that known to his contacts in the media."

This particular "Nofziger job," however, was aborted possibly because the White House didn't want to advertise the movie even with unfavorable publicity.

At the same time that President Nixon made skillful use of leaks to smear his political foes, he went to elaborate, even illegal lengths to stop leaks about himself.

So he formed the para-police "plumbers" unit, which was supposed to plug unauthorized leaks. Another ex-White House leaker, Charles W. Colson, has acknowledged in his courtroom confession that the "plumbers" broke into the offices of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist, however, not to plug a leak but to get dirt against Ellsberg to leak out.

Ironically, most of the White House horrors, which have by now effectively destroyed the presidency of Richard M. Nixon, were committed in reaction to press leaks in an attempt to stop them.

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